



**TOWN OF MANSFIELD  
COMMUNITY QUALITY OF LIFE COMMITTEE**

**Thursday, December 3, 2009**

**7:30 P.M.**

**Mansfield Town Hall  
Council Chambers**

**1. DRAFT MINUTES OF MEETING**

**Present:** Joe Briody, David Morse, Denise Keane, Jane Fried, Elizabeth Paterson, Steve Rhodes

**Staff:** Matt Hart, Mike Nintean, Greg Padick, Jim Hintz

**Note:** Elizabeth Paterson and Matt Hart joined the meeting midway through discussion of Item 7(c)

1. Joe Briody agreed to act as chair of this meeting. The Committee agreed to change the order of the Agenda, considering item 7(c) first under Items of Business.

2. Steve Rhodes agreed to take minutes.

3. Minutes of the October 1, 2009 were approved.

4. Opportunity for Public to Address the Committee – Toni Moran, newly-elected member of the Town Council, introduced herself and expressed interest in the work of this committee.

5. Chairperson's Report – Chairperson not present.

6. Communications:

a) Members reviewed the October 1, 2009 letter from Town Attorney Dennis O'Brien regarding the definition of 'family' for housing-code purposes and designating students as a separate land-use class. Greg Padick elaborated on the letter, noting that in the Town Attorney's opinion, the Town may appropriately differentiate 'student-rental' property use from general use. The Town will need a clear definition of 'student' for a potential ordinance, and also needs to update its definitions of 'family' and 'privileged groups' in its zoning regulations.

Greg Padick and Mike Nintean reviewed the Town staff's progress in drafting an ordinance to designate approved parking plans at one-, two-, and three-individual rental dwellings and also a student-tenant registry ordinance. Enforcement of the proposed occupancy ordinance will be mostly complaint-driven, given limitations of Town staff levels. There was general discussion of enforcement of these ordinances. The anticipated change from current enforcement practice will be the addition of fines and maintenance of a list of current tenants. Members also discussed whether landlords or

tenants, or both, should be ticketed for violations. Staff recommended that maximum flexibility be maintained to guarantee defensible enforcement. Jim Hintz recommended that the landlord be involved in any enforcement action. Greg Padick commented on the need for a phase-in period if changes are made to reduce occupancy limits from four to three under the Town's ordinance authority. Presently, staff recommends that a reasonable phase-in period be allowed for existing landlords who manage tenants on the basis of the current four-person-occupancy definition, while sale or exchange of a property would automatically invoke the new definition. The goal of the reduction in the permitted number of tenants in a 'family dwelling' is to make these neighborhood homes less attractive as rental opportunities.

Jim Hintz noted that legal privacy requirements should be considered as an ordinance is drafted. Public listing of tenant names may not be legally defensible. A provision for tenants to opt to maintain privacy of their individual names was discussed. Jane Fried stated that the focus of the ordinance is on behavior detrimental to neighborhoods, not occupancy per se.

The Committee expressed by consensus that it is comfortable with how Town staff is proceeding with drafting at this point.

b) Notes from the discussion meeting of November 5, 2009 were acknowledged (a quorum was not present at the November 5 meeting).

## 7. Items of Business:

c) Jane Fried gave a presentation on community conversations, distributing "From Debate to Dialogue" by Deborah Flick (attached), and also her observations about community/college-student interactions in Willimantic. Jane believes that facilitating conversations between students and town residents, based on this outline, in one or two of Mansfield's residential neighborhoods troubled by interactions with student residents promises to change the existing climate of tension and build mutual respect. Committee members discussed ways that voluntary participation in such discussions could be achieved.

Jane also reported on interactions between Eastern Connecticut State University in Willimantic and residential neighborhoods. President Nunez of Eastern chairs a large committee of 60-70 homeowners who meet to discuss neighborhood problems with student residents. The Dean of Students and the Vice President for Student Affairs participate in these meetings, and take direct action with students, based on information shared at these meetings. The approach is based upon direct relationships between top administrators at Eastern and individual students. Jane reported that this approach has improved the situation in Willimantic, and believes that involvement of top administrators is key to success.

Jim Hintz noted that Eastern's code of student conduct does not apply to off-campus living situations, as it does at UConn. Matt Hart noted that President Hogan and other top administrators at UConn have been working well with the Town on these issues. Others suggested that University administration has given only lip-service to the problems in Mansfield's residential neighborhoods.

After extended discussion, the Committee approved unanimously the following resolution: The Committee on Quality of Life voices its support for UConn's recent efforts to improve relations with the community. It recommends that the Mansfield Town Council invite President Hogan to use the authority and visibility of his office to address the special challenges faced by residential neighborhoods that are now feeling the impact of disruptive student behavior. It hopes he will join with our mayor to create appropriate forums for dialogue.

d) Town staff continues to prepare a draft Tenant Registry Ordinance. This item postponed until draft is ready for Committee review.

e) Town staff continues research to draft a new definition of 'family' in Town regulations. This item postponed until draft is ready for Committee review.

a) Committee member Denise Koehn has been elected a member of the Town Council and will continue to participate in the Quality of Life Committee, but as one of the Council representatives. Toni Moran will serve as the second Council representative.

b) The Committee approved its regular meeting schedule for calendar year 2010: the first Thursday of each month, at 7:30 p.m. The Committee will select a new chairperson at its next meeting.

Meeting adjourned at 9:15 p.m.

### **FROM DEBATE TO DIALOGUE**

**By Deborah Flick, Ph. D. (1998)**

#### **What does dialogue involve?**

Understanding others, listening deeply, suspending judgment, walking in another person's shoes, uncovering and examining assumptions.

*Listening* means accepting at face value what another person is saying as being true for that person. (p.22)

*Inquiring* means asking questions to deepen understanding about what something means to someone else. (p.26)

*Advocating* means asserting our own position and the evidence we trust without disrespecting or dismissing another person's position . Different perspectives on the same information often lead to different conclusions.

Martin Buber spoke to this topic when he stated, " Experiencing the other side means to feel the event from the side of the person one meets as well as from one's own side. It is an inclusiveness which realizes the other person in the actuality of his (sic) being." P.3

#### **Dialogue Outcomes**

Mutual understanding, increased trust, willingness to listen to perspectives that one doesn't hold because one's own perspectives are also listened to. Personal outcomes also include diminished anger, willingness to take personal responsibility for one's behavior and the consequences it incurs in a specific context.